



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**WOONSOCKET'S PHILMONT WORSTED COMPANY MILL
LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER**

A Woonsocket textile mill built in 1919 has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of industry. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added the Philmont Worsted Mill to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. Built to house a custom spinner of fine worsted yarns, the Philmont Worsted Mill embodies the history of the worsted industry in northern Rhode Island, especially the introduction of French and Belgian capital and the dominance of French-speaking management.

The Philmont Worsted Mill is a three-story, brick building with a concrete block addition located at the corner of Social and Elm streets in the Jenckesville neighborhood of Woonsocket. The 60' x 200' main block was constructed in 1919 to house spinning operations of the Guerin Company. It has a shallow-pitched gable roof with a monitor and a low brick parapet at front and rear. There are single and triple windows. The one-story, flat-roof, cement block addition was constructed in 1955 for a warehouse and shipping/receiving facility.

Joseph Guerin (1851-1923) and his son Theofile (1874-1961) both immigrated from Belgium

to Woonsocket in the early 1890s to take positions at local textile mills. They were the first of a long line of French and Belgian investors in the woolen industries of northern Rhode Island. This wave of investors was drawn to the area by a number of economic advantages: access to the American market while avoiding the substantial protective tariffs; a hard-working, French-speaking workforce with a history of resistance to trade unions; and tax incentives for the construction of new mills.

Northern Rhode Island was promoted to European textile interests by French-Canadian immigrant and Woonsocket booster Aram Pothier. A fluent French speaker with keen business acumen, Pothier toured the textile regions of Verviers, Turcoing, and Roubaix, both before and after his election as mayor of Woonsocket. On these trips he convinced foreign investors to build mills in his city. As governor of Rhode Island from 1909 to 1915 and 1925 to 1928, he touted the advantages of the area as a location for European capital and expertise, and the influx of investment to northern Rhode Island in the 1890s and 1900s owed in no small part to his influence.

Within two years of their arrival, the Guerins established the Guerin Spinning Company, maker of woolen and worsted yarns at Sayles and Prendergast Mill. Joseph Guerin served as general manager of the spinning company; he appointed his son as assistant manager. Two years later in 1895, Joseph Guerin and his partners purchased an old 1828 mill on the site of the present Philmont Worsted Mill, improved it, and set it up for spinning.

The Guerins' spinning operation was a success—within two years the company had built a large addition and installed a new boiler and steam engine. Over the next three decades the Guerins invested in and developed a number of new textile operations. In 1900 Theophile Guerin organized the Falls Yarn Mill for manufacture of woolen and merino yarns, and also the Montrose Mill for weaving suitings. Guerin-related interests eventually came to include the Alsace Worsted Mill (1903) and the Rosemont Dyeing Company (1905). By the time the Guerins incorporated in 1922, they operated 21,000 spindles, 112 looms, and a dyeing and finishing operation, and shipped their yarn to weaving mills across North America.

Organized by Theofile and partners in 1919, the Philmont Worsted Company was the last of the Guerin companies. They constructed their new brick mill on a parcel just south of the 1828 building. At the new facility, 260 operatives spun worsted and mohair yarns on 14,000 spindles. Philmont was the Guerins' first spinning mill organized on the "English" or "Bradford" system using frame spinners, as opposed to the "French" system using mule spinners. By 1919, the English system was the universal standard in the area.

Theofile Guerin managed Philmont until 1923. The company carried on production until 1933, when operations were ended in the depths of the Great Depression. Worsted yarn production returned to the mill in 1937 and lasted until 1955 under Sydney Blumenthal and Company. The building is familiar to many as the "Bancroft Mill" from the Bancroft Sporting Goods Company which occupied the mills through the 1980s.

The National Register nomination for the Philmont Worsted Mill was prepared by Edward Connors. According to Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the RIHPHC, "The Philmont Mill is important to Woonsocket's industrial history and for its association with French-Canadian heritage. Today a \$6 million rehabilitation project is converting the mill into 45 apartments and is part of the revitalization of Woonsocket, thanks to historic preservation tax credits administered by the RIHPHC."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

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